

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, as I go about my district, I like to meet with the average Wisconsinite to see what is on their mind. It is so much more illuminating than hanging around Washington and meeting with lobbyists.

Whether I stop in convenience stores or food stores, which I do between my meetings, inevitably the talk turns to abuse of the EBT card. I hear stories again and again of people selling EBT cards for 50 cents on the dollar, which apparently means that some people don't need them. Another complaint is some clerks are able to look at the card, or it turns up on the receipt how much money they have left on the card, and there may be thousands of dollars there, which is also a problem.

I thought: What can we do to prevent some of this abuse? We have introduced a bill called ID for EBT Card, in which a person's photograph would have to appear on the card.

When I speak to the clerks in my convenience stores, they unanimously believe that this would be a good idea and be a step toward fighting the fraud and abuse in this program.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN FIRST DISTRICT OF INDIANA

(Mr. MRVAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. MRVAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my appreciation for another recent success for the First District of Indiana from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Just this week, the Department of Transportation shared that the cities of East Chicago, Gary, and Hammond received funding under the Safe Streets and Roads for All grant program to develop plans for infrastructure projects designed to reduce transportation-related fatalities and serious injuries.

I am grateful for all the leaders and public servants in these cities putting in the work to successfully obtain and utilize this new Federal resource.

As we proceed, I look forward to continuing to work with all local stakeholders and my colleagues to support and promote the safety of our transportation infrastructure so that all individuals and businesses can continue to thrive and attract new economic activity to our communities.

HONORING WORLD WAR II VETERAN JESS SAENZ

(Mr. CORREA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to honor my good friend, World War II veteran Jess Saenz, who was a member of the Greatest Generation. He passed away at the age of 98.

Born in 1924, Saenz was 19 and had recently graduated from Anaheim High School when he joined the military in 1943.

Jess was 1 of 50 young men from the historic Colonia Independencia, a segregated Mexican-American community in my hometown of Anaheim, California, who fought in the Great War.

Jess fought the Germans in the Ardennes of France and would later tell us his stories of how he lived in foxholes for 14 months, withstanding cold winter nights and drenching rains.

The war, he said, taught him to be responsible and made him a greater man.

Upon his return to the United States in 1946, he married Nellie, raised four children, became a carpenter, and helped build this great country.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in saluting World War II veteran Jess Saenz, a true American hero and a member of the Greatest Generation.

□ 1745

WORKING FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JOHNSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Louisiana?

There was no objection.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, the 118th Congress is in full swing now. We are here working full time again for the American people.

I just wanted to take a few moments tonight here on the House floor to clarify some things about how this new Congress has begun.

I point out, first, for scheduling purposes, of course, the State of the Union is next week. It is a time for the President to take stock and speak to the American people about where our country is today and where we are heading.

I hope the President is able to make good use of the opportunity, but I am afraid we are going to be subjected to more spin and few solutions to the major challenges, even the crises facing the American people.

Mr. Speaker, much has been made by the Democrats and the press about how House Republicans have kicked off the 118th Congress, but we all know the chatter is not an accurate representation of what is really going on around here.

The cameras don't capture it all. We are delighted that the C-SPAN cameras are roving about the floor now. It gives a little more personal view of what is happening here in the Chamber, but so much of what goes on outside these walls is not apparent to the American people.

Let's be plain about this. Let's put it plainly in real terms what is actually happening now. There are some real reforms that have been brought forward by the new House Republican majority.

We now have a much more open legislative process. As I explained to some friends back home over the weekend, we all remember the cartoon. I am 51 years old. We remember the cartoon Saturday mornings, "I am just a bill on Capitol Hill," and it explained how a bill becomes a law. I explained to our friends from Louisiana who were in town that that has not actually been the way a bill becomes a law in this Congress for several years now.

We are getting back to that process. We are getting back to what we were taught in civics about how this is supposed to work. Bills have to be limited now to one single subject. We will no longer vote on a bill without giving Members at least 72 hours' notice to review it first. What a concept. You might have to actually read that legislation before you vote on it.

This is an important change: Any tax increase must now meet a higher threshold to pass. It was a simple majority, but now it is a two-thirds vote. That is a really important reform for the American people, given the state of the economy.

There will be no new mandatory Federal spending increases without equal or greater budget offsets. We have a \$31.5 trillion Federal debt. We cannot continue on this trajectory. These reforms are really important for us.

By the way, remote voting and committee work are finally ended. No longer will you see Members phoning in their work. They have to be here. They have to come to work.

Let's contrast that with the old way of doing business. Under the previous leadership of former Speaker NANCY PELOSI—the Democrats had been in charge here for 4 years—we had bills written behind closed doors, sometimes literally by just a handful of people. The bills were loaded up with unrelated policies. These bills were unveiled, then brought for a remote vote before anybody could possibly read them, much less debate or amend the legislation.

We all know the Democrats are obsessed with having a top-down approach to legislating. I mean, they have all but shouted it from the rooftops over the past few weeks. Sure, that might have made former Speaker PELOSI's job easier, but it was not good for the American people. It was not good for the country. It was not good for this revered institution.

I suspect if you ask the American people, they would all agree. This is just common sense. We are restoring common sense here. We made commitments to America, and we are going to fulfill them.

Here is the reality: House Republicans have started this year by instituting the most positive reforms to this House in a generation. With Republicans back in charge, the status

quo, where there is no transparency, no accountability, outright disregard for regular order, is finally over, and that is a very, very good thing for the country.

Mr. Speaker, this week we are voting to end the COVID pandemic emergency order. This is one of the topics we have taken up, we have committed to the American people that we would do it when we started the Congress, and we have.

President Biden has said the pandemic is over. His press secretary says it isn't. Since the White House couldn't get its story straight, we voted now to put an end to the public health emergency declaration. Since the pandemic is over, the emergency declaration should be over as well.

Mr. Speaker, this week we are also passing the SHOW UP Act. Talk about something that is popular with the American people. This House has ended remote work in this body, the Senate did it long ago across the hall, and now we are voting to do the same thing for the remainder of the Federal Government. It is beyond time to require that the teleworking Federal employees return to work in order to remedy widespread terribly poor customer service.

Consider this: The IRS, just the IRS, they have a backlog right now of more than 8 million tax returns from 2021. Prior to widespread teleworking, the backlog was approximately just 1 million. That is an unacceptable thing. We have Federal employees at all these agencies who literally have not come to work. Well, we are going to end that. It is clear that these backlogs and customer service problems are due at least in part to ongoing teleworking policies, even as the pandemic is now in the rearview mirror.

Mr. Speaker, with Republicans back in charge, I could give you many examples of things that are going to be improving around here. That is just a couple. The House is back to work, and we intend to get the rest of the government back to work for the American people as well, whether all of our colleagues like that or not.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from the great State of California (Mr. KILEY), my new colleague on the House Judiciary Committee, to discuss another important issue from this week.

Mr. KILEY. Mr. Speaker, this week the House passed the Pandemic is Over Act, terminating the national COVID-19 state of emergency.

Now, of course, the pandemic is over. It has been over for some time. Americans are well aware of this. It seems only the government has not been aware of it at the national level and in certain States in this country.

The House of Representatives passed this bill ending the state of emergency, ending the national emergency, and the President responded in a very interesting way. He agreed with us. He said: Yes, the emergency is over on May 11, which is a very interesting concept. An emergency that you can schedule to end in advance.

This is a page out of Gavin Newsom's book in California where the state of emergency there had continued month after month, year after year, and as the absurdities piled up, as California last year hosted the Super Bowl during a state of emergency.

As, by the way, the Governor refused to abide personally by the dictates issued pursuant to that emergency, eventually he was forced to say, okay, I will end it, and he decided to end it 6 months in advance. The state of emergency in California will now be lapsing on February 28, for those keeping score at home, and the national emergency will be lapsing on May 11.

This is inherently against the very concept of an emergency, to say that we can schedule it to end at a specific date in the future. It is also against the very concept of an emergency to say that it can last for 3 years.

We have in this country for now almost 3 years experienced our form of government being turned on its head. At the national level, and in particular certain States, our entire separation of powers, checks and balances, and representative government collapsed under a one-man rule.

Now that we have moved on from most of that—although there are still some remnants of the controls that were put in place still in effect—we are in a position to assess what was the outcome of all this. Yes, there was some uniformity in terms of Federal policy, but there was a great degree of difference in terms of how different States responded.

In my State of California, we had the highest level of government coercion and control throughout the entire COVID-19 experience. We had the most onerous business shutdowns, the longest school shutdowns, the worst church shutdowns. We had the most onerous mask mandates and vaccine mandates and vaccine passports.

Each and every step of the way, California had the highest level of government coercion and control, generally done via executive orders without the say of the people, without the say of the legislature, without meaningful judicial review, with 40 million people of our State expected to simply comply. That was the California experience. That was the experience to a lesser extent of many other States.

But then you had States like Florida that decided that citizens could be trusted to make decisions for themselves, that empowered local communities to govern themselves, that focused on disease control rather than population control.

We can now look, having been through this for a few years and having had very different approaches, what was the result of this difference in policy?

Well, economically speaking, California had basically the highest unemployment rate in the entire country throughout the COVID-19 state of emergency, whereas Florida had just

about the lowest unemployment rate in the country throughout the state of emergency.

California has experienced student learning loss unlike anything that has ever been seen before in this country. There has been a 6 percent decline in third graders reading at grade level over the last few years, a 7 percent decline for fourth graders in meeting ELA standards, whereas Florida achieved the highest national assessment of educational progress ranking in their history across math and reading for fourth and eighth graders in 2022.

In California, to take another example, in L.A. our students lost an equivalent of 6 months of math in terms of their overall education in that period of time. We will be grappling with the consequences of this for a long, long time. California experienced an economic and educational calamity that States like Florida did not experience.

What did we get in return?

We were all told this was done for the purpose of safety. It was done in order to save lives. We can now assess that claim.

When you look at the actual numbers, there was no difference. Age-adjusted COVID mortality rates between California and Florida were a wash. It was the same, despite the unbelievable toll that the lockdowns and related policies took on the people of California.

You can also make comparisons within our State. I represent a number of counties that did everything possible to take the approach that Florida did despite what we were dealing with at the State level.

In Placer County, for example, we were the first county in the State to end the local state of emergency. We had our kids back in school earlier than anywhere else in California. We were among the first to end mask mandates and to challenge vaccine mandates, and we did everything possible to enable our businesses to remain open. All the while, we took the steps that were necessary to give vulnerable individuals the tools that they needed to protect themselves.

Now, all the while, those of us who favored trusting citizens, who favored freedom, were attacked viciously by the likes of the Governor of California, who personally attacked me by name and said that I believed it would have been better to let Californians die.

Again, you can look at the results in Placer County as compared to other parts of California. Our students did much better, our employment rate was roughly half the State average, and our public health outcomes were much better, with a COVID mortality rate about two-thirds that of the rest of the State.

The evidence now is very clear as to what approach worked and what approach didn't. Those States that tried as much as possible to maintain the structure of our constitutional form of government did a lot better than those

States that decided an emergency could be used to effectuate an indeterminate one-man rule.

But there are some who are now saying, as a recent headline in *The Atlantic* magazine put it, that we should simply declare a pandemic amnesty at this point. We should move on, we should forget about all of the damage that was done to our kids, who may never get the education, may never make up for the learning loss that they experienced. We should forget about the damage that was done to businesses that in many cases have been permanently lost, 200,000 businesses throughout the country that were shuttered. We should simply move on and forget about it. Forgive and forget.

Look, I am all for letting bygones be bygones, and I am willing to work with anyone who is interested in creating good policy going forward. But we do need to pause and consider how it is that this happened in our country, how did we get to a point where the appearance of a virus could cause our entire form of government to collapse?

□ 1800

Our Founders were not unfamiliar with emergencies. After all, they had just been through a war of independence and yet, they still believed that combining the executive, legislative, and judicial powers in a single set of hands, as James Madison put it, was the very definition of tyranny.

So how, well over two centuries now after the founding, did we get to a point where our institutions were so susceptible to collapse?

I think that is a question that merits serious scrutiny because it could point us in the direction of getting back to some of the founding principles that we have lost touch with.

The fact is that we have seen governmental power become more and more centralized and consolidated in recent decades in this country, and it simply became all too easy to fast-forward that process to its logical endpoint of one-man rule.

We have seen our political institutions become less and less representative, less and less self-governing institutions, and it became all too easy to make them not representative at all. Or we have seen more and more of our levers of power in government controlled by special interest groups, especially in California, my State, and so it became all too easy to let special interests completely run the show as it did when it came to the school shutdowns.

So I don't believe that we can simply move on and turn the page and forget about what happened in this country for the last few years. I think we need to give serious thought as to what led us to this point and how we can move ahead and actually now get the pendulum swinging in the other direction. That is a far more in-depth conversation than my time today would permit, but I simply would like to offer a few ideas.

The first is that we need to definitively end the emergency, not on May 11 but now, not in California on February 28, but now, and any other States that are retaining the altered legal forms that were put in place through the emergency. Along with that, we need to end all remaining mandates that exist.

We took a major step in that direction yesterday in this House by passing legislation to end President Biden's vaccine mandate for healthcare workers.

We also need to look at reforming our emergency laws, to make it so you cannot so easily declare an emergency that lasts for years and is allowed to continue indefinitely without any serious review of whether the conditions of the emergency continue to exist.

In a broader sense, I think that this is a moment where we as a country need to look at the consolidation and centralization of political power in this country. Yes, at the State level but largely at the Federal level, and especially in bureaucracies that operate outside any sort of accountability on the part of voters.

We simply have seen this happen over the course of decades in this country, and it has veered us farther and farther from the idea of self-government that was the great American innovation: the institution of self-government.

Now I am seeing encouraging signs in many ways that this is beginning to happen. For example, I am starting to see at the school board level, parents are getting involved like never before. Parents are running for school board and changing the way that local school districts operate and trying to fight against mandates from the State level that tell them how they should run their schools.

The beauty of this is that it gives parents a direct access point in terms of how their local schools are run. That is the idea of self-government, and I think that is something to build on going forward.

Finally, on the note of education, I do think we need to get much more serious in this country about civic education which used to be something that was not simply some addendum to one of your classes but was part and parcel of your entire education: what it was about, to prepare you for active citizenship, to be well grounded in what has made America such a unique country in our Nation's history, the greatest country in the world's history; what the Constitution is about; why we have institutions like freedom of speech; why the separation of powers and checks and balances are important.

I think if we start to teach these things more meaningfully in our schools, then it would reinforce our civic institutions. It would leave them less vulnerable to the sort of transformation that they were put through over the course of the last few years. And should we ever face another pandemic or whatever other threat that

may come our way, I think we will be much better prepared to get through it in the way that Florida did and in the way that Placer County did. And not, unfortunately, in the way that California and many other parts of this country had to suffer through with such a high cost to so many people.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from California. Those are some very important insights from the West Coast. We pray that America does not make those same decisions in the other States. I am grateful for principled leadership out of California here in the House.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GROTHMAN), my good friend and colleague.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that this week things have—the quality of intellectual thought in this country has declined to the degree that we have to bring a resolution to the floor condemning socialism, but that is the way it is.

Recently, polls have shown among young people, about half have a positive view of socialism. Now, of course these are young people whose opinions are largely gathered not by personal experience but by what their schoolteachers tell them or what they see on television, so that may be part of the problem, and hopefully, they will grow their way out of it.

Nevertheless, I do feel it necessary to make some statements as to why socialism is an inferior way to govern and is completely incompatible with people who want to live in a free society.

The first thing you need to know about socialism, of course, it leads to material goods which are not as good as those under a free market system. A lot of that means because the government controls everything, you don't have an opportunity to have competition. The poor restaurant, the poor manufacturer is never forced out of business, never forced to improve, and as a result it means a poorer society. A lot of times the material goods by themselves is one of the reasons throughout history you see people leave the Marxist, socialist sort of society and flee towards the free market system.

Cubans leaving to come to the United States. When I visit the southern border, the Border Patrol always talks about the Cubans. There are a lot of Cuban doctors coming here—wealthy by Cuban standards—but still they can become much more wealthy in the U.S.

In the old days of the Cold War, people left from East Germany to West Germany, from North Vietnam to South Vietnam to get to a country in which there are more goods and more quality. But I always feel it is a little bit wrong to overly focus on the fact that the free market inevitably means much better material wealth.

It also deals with the freedom to do anything else. When you have a socialist society, the government in a pure

socialist society employs everybody. And even in a partially socialist society, a much higher percentage of people wind up working for the government and have to work for the government.

Like all Republicans, in my political career, again and again, I have had people come up to me and tell me things privately that they can't say publicly because they work for the government.

Schoolteachers who come up to me and give a Republican perspective on things or things they may disagree with that the school board is doing. But because they work for the government, they can only talk to me quietly like they were in the Soviet Union or Communist China.

When I was in Wisconsin and we changed the laws to give more flexibility on how we deal with public employees about 12 years ago—it was under Governor Walker—all Republicans knew public employees who quietly sided with Governor Walker, but because they worked for the government, the little socialist part of America, they couldn't openly side with Governor Walker. They had to quietly whisper like we were in a Communist country.

That is what happens when you have too many people working for the government.

The Department of Natural Resources is another example of that. Again, people are coming and saying they are doing things wrong, but they dare not say so publicly because they work for the government.

Of course, in addition to employees who work for the DNR or work for the university, it is not just political beliefs that they may have to hide in the intolerance area of a very liberal political entity—I am thinking about Dane County, which is where Madison, Wisconsin is—people, again, where the government is so big, they are forced not only to hide their political beliefs, they may have to hide their religious beliefs because they are afraid that when it comes to promotions, when it comes to hiring, when it comes to firing, it could affect them negatively because such a high percentage of jobs come with the government.

It is not just that. In a pure socialist society, because there is a shortage of goods, the ability to purchase goods can also be dependent on toeing the party line. We know that in Russia, or previously Cuba, the ability to purchase things is dependent on toeing the party line. You can work all you want but unless you are a member of the party or toe the party line, you can't get the quality of goods that are there. That is inevitably something that happens when the government becomes so powerful.

Other perks are restricted if you don't toe the party line, things like travel in a socialist state. Over time, you begin to have restrictions and maybe the opportunities to travel abroad are only given to people who have displayed fealty to the state.

One of the things I am told to look out for in Cuba is—Cuba, of course, being an island nation—you would expect to have lots of boats all around the island for people to go and fish, people just to take advantage of the Caribbean. But in fact, there are very few boats because Cuba is a socialist country and they are afraid people would use those boats to leave the country. That is another trait that you have in advanced socialism.

Other things they may stamp down on you for, they restrict your free speech because they don't want anybody saying anything that might be something the government disagrees with.

If you look at Communist China, even though to a degree they have a free market, the huge government, because they are afraid of any dissent, anybody telling the truth, cracks down on churches. It seems hard to believe that you cannot openly talk about Christianity, openly talk about Christ in China, but I am afraid you can't.

You hear about Falun Gong in China saying things that maybe aren't approved by the government and therefore people crack down on that organization as well.

In any event, when young people say they are for socialism or if you have any children or grandchildren out there who say there is socialism, point out to them the inevitable lack of freedom that comes with it, that a high number of people have to work for the government. And if you have to work for the government, they can promote you or hire you or fire you based upon political beliefs, based upon religious beliefs.

In a free market system, there are really an almost unlimited number of people you can work with. There are so many different businesses in the free market system. If you don't like to work for someone else, you can always start your own business. That is something that you can't do under socialism, or they want to make it very difficult.

So I am glad that the United States Congress, at least later this week or early next week, is going to go on record saying that we don't like socialism. It should be completely unnecessary. And the fact that so many young people think socialism might be okay is really a damning indictment of the educational, both K-12 and university, system in this country.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the gentleman from Wisconsin. That is very well said. The evils of socialism have crept into all manner of our politics and areas of our culture.

Mr. Speaker, I will end our Special Order hour by just reminding the American people here watching and keeping track of this, that again, as I said in the opening, the Republican majority is in charge. The Congress is now fully operational and we are back to work for the American people.

Every week now, we will be passing substantive legislation that will send a message to the people that there is a new sheriff in town.

Today, in our House Committee on the Judiciary, we had an hour's long hearing on the catastrophe at the border, hearing from those who are down there contending with that situation every single day. The hearings like that one will lead us to legislative repairs for some of these problems that have been created by the Biden administration and the Democrats in charge here the last couple of years.

This week, we are voting to end the COVID pandemic emergency order at long last. We are passing the SHOW UP Act to get all these Federal employees back to work. And as Mr. GROTHMAN indicated, tomorrow we will be voting to condemn socialism.

There is going to be a dramatic change between the Republicans in charge of this House and the Democrats. We are grateful for the opportunity to lead. We will do that every day and we will make the American people proud with our policy reforms and our process reforms.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1815

PROTECTING PISTOL-BRACED FIREARMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CLYDE) for 30 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CLYDE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Georgia?

There was no objection.

Mr. CLYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, on January 13 of this year, the ATF finalized its unconstitutional rule pertaining to firearms with stabilizing braces. Under this new ATF rule, any pistol-braced firearm would be considered an illegal short-barreled rifle, subjecting these firearms to draconian regulations under the NFA, the National Firearms Act of 1934, and turning millions of law-abiding gun owners into criminals literally overnight.

Unselected antigun bureaucrats informed law-abiding gun owners possessing pistols with these braces attached that they will have only 120 days to register them once the rule is published in the Federal Register. This 120-day amnesty window started yesterday, January 31.

As we have seen across the world time and time again, what comes before gun confiscation? Gun registration. That is right. That is exactly what ATF is now demanding.